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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

*Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review completed

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DIA review completed.

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

*(Information as of 1500)*

SOUTH VIETNAM

Madame Binh may journey to South Vietnam. The Communists are still blocking government efforts to retake territory in Quang Tri Province. Communist briefings are calling for increased military action this month. The new decree on political parties continues to stir up controversy in Saigon.

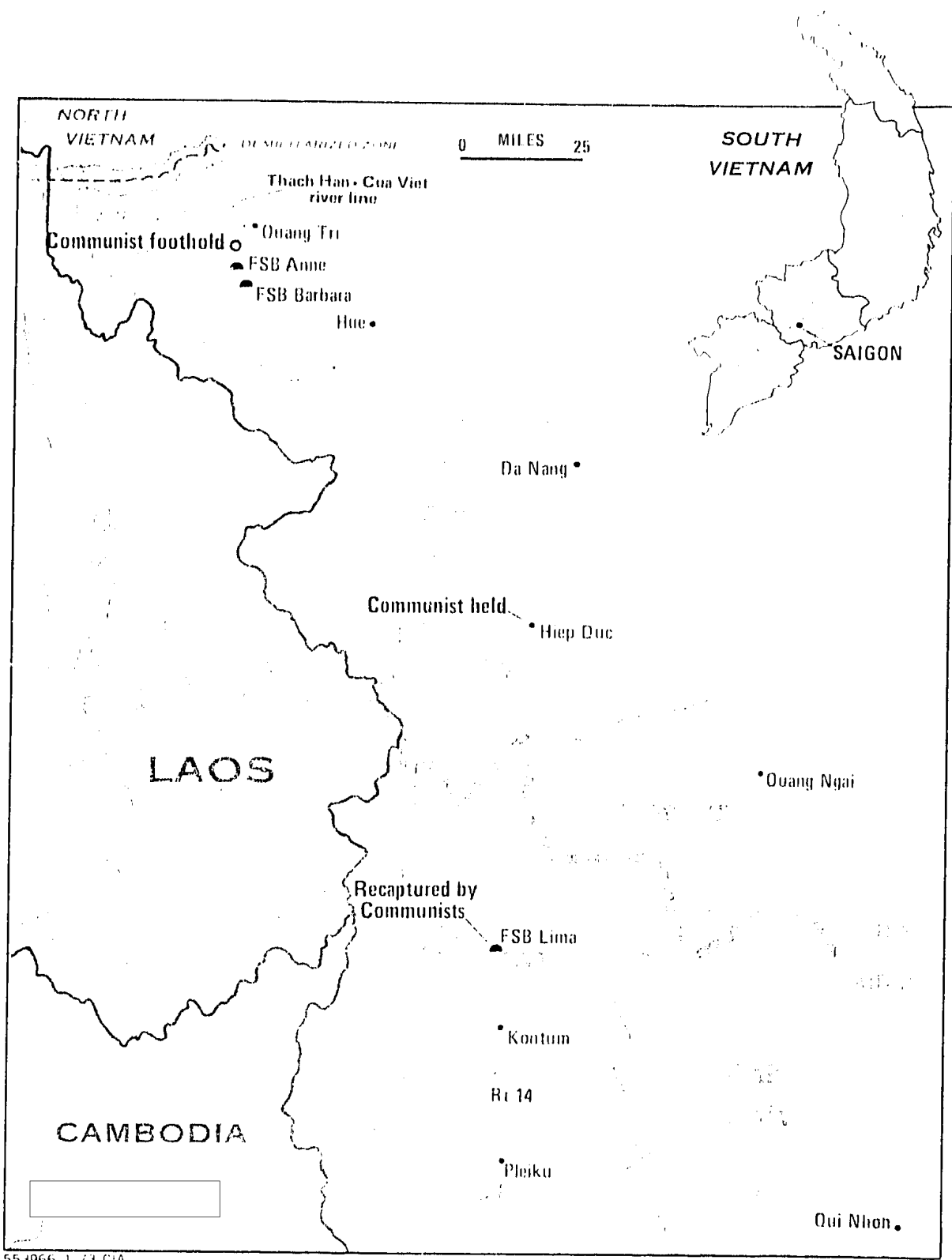
LAOS

The Communists are making a determined effort to take Saravane.

CAMBODIA

Communist harassment of roads continues.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Madame Binh intends to visit the Communist-held parts of South Vietnam's Quang Tri Province, according to a [ ] State Department cable from Paris. If she goes, the Communists are likely to give the trip heavy press coverage--although they probably will wait until after the fact in order to minimize the risk to her party. She may also invite representatives from the embassies of such "revolutionary" countries as Cuba and Algeria to accompany her.

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The Military Situation

North Vietnamese forces in Quang Tri Province continue to block government efforts to eliminate the last major Communist foothold below the Thach Han River, about five miles southwest of the provincial capital. Most of the enemy artillery fire in recent days has been concentrated on South Vietnamese troops trying to move into this area. The Communists have also increased their shellings and ground probes around FSB's Anne and Barbara farther west.

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In the Quang Nam - Quang Tin province border area, South Vietnamese troops are meeting stiff resistance to their campaign to retake Hiep Duc, one of ten district capitals still held by the Communists. Farther south in the central highlands, government efforts to expand defense lines north of Kontum City suffered a setback over the weekend with the loss of FSB Lima. The base was reoccupied by South Vietnamese regulars last December to facilitate government operations into Communist-held territory along Route 14. This territory was lost by the government last spring during the early weeks of the Communist offensive.

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More Communist Exhortations

The Communists continue to issue instructions for heavier fighting. [redacted]

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[redacted] COSVN in early January ordered a command near Saigon to increase the number of shellings beginning on 5 January, and to heighten their intensity on 10 and 20 January. By limiting action to artillery and rocket attacks against South Vietnamese fire support bases, airports, depots and storage areas, and by avoiding infantry attacks against well-defended targets, the Communists probably hope to avoid any serious depletion of their manpower. COSVN's purpose in calling for the new attacks ostensibly is to pressure the US to sign a cease-fire agreement at the renewed Paris negotiations.

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[redacted] the Communists hope to force the US to agree in principle on a draft cease-fire even if the document is not signed immediately. Such a US public commitment allegedly is needed to halt further deterioration in Communist troop morale.

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[redacted] the decline in morale could become irreversible if further delays occur.

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There have been a number of indications during the past few weeks of Communist plans to increase action in connection with the reconvening of the Paris talks and the US presidential inauguration on 20 January. Much of the rhetoric expended in briefing Viet Cong cadre about such plans, however, may be intended to keep them alert and their minds off their problems. While artillery and rocket attacks have increased in recent days, especially in the southern half of the country, they have not been of a magnitude that Communist directives have been calling for.

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Parties React to New Decree

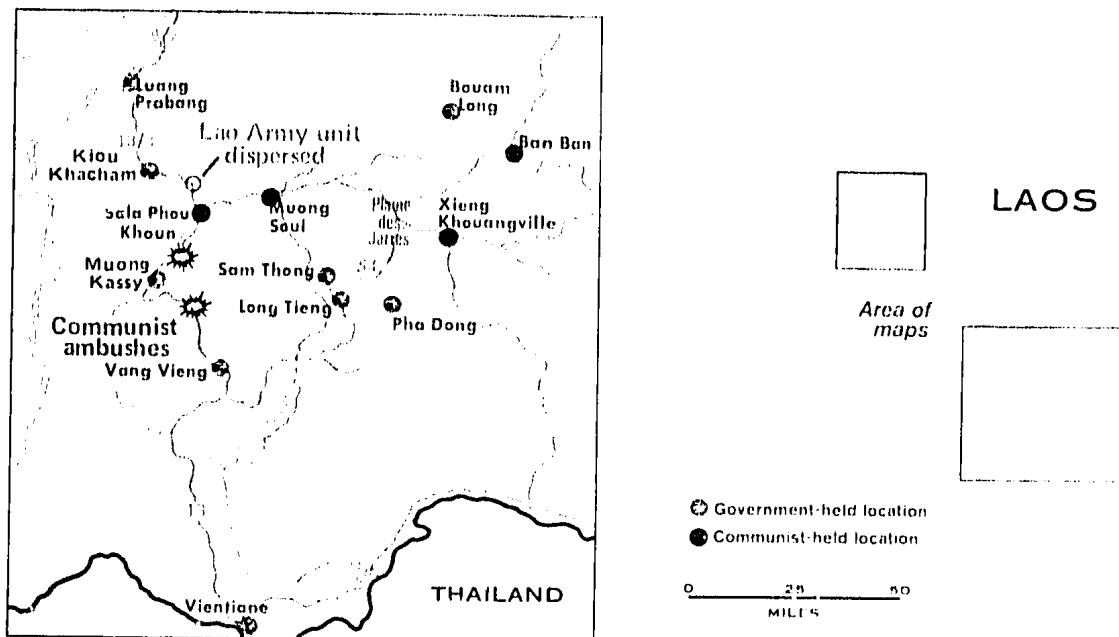
Political party leaders are continuing to respond to the decree on political parties. Ha Thuc Ky, who heads the Revolutionary Dai Viet (RDV) Party, told US Embassy officers last weekend that he has petitioned the Supreme Court to declare the decree unconstitutional. Ky asserts that the Emergency Powers Law authorized President Thieu to decree legislation only in the fields of security, defense, finance, and the economy, and that the measure on political parties does not fit under any of these categories. Ky charges that Thieu is trying to eliminate all parties and set up a dictatorship, and added that the RDV has no intention of cooperating in this venture.

Ky claims that the RDV has no intention of trying to meet the provisions of the new law or of merging with any other party. His party cooperated with Thieu in one short-lived coalition a few years ago, but recently it has adopted an increasingly critical posture. Ky apparently has little hope that the Supreme Court will actually overturn the decree, but he expects that the Court will not issue a ruling for some time, thus forestalling immediate application of the measure to the RDV.

Another independent group, the labor union-based Farmer Worker Party (FWP), apparently hopes to be able to meet the provisions of the decree.

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LAOS

The Communists are making a determined effort to drive government defenders from Saravane. Elements of the North Vietnamese 968th Division on 8 January shelled or assaulted all eleven government battalions defending the town, and field commanders report that the situation is critical. The heaviest ground attacks came just south of Saravane, where two irregular battalions were dispersed and four others heavily engaged. Communist infantry units also probed defenses north and west of the town. A sustained mortar and artillery bombardment of the town has prevented evacuation of wounded government troops.

Almost all units of the 968th Division are located around Saravane, leaving government units moving north from Paksong an open field. A small irregular force has occupied a ridge overlooking Thateng and the junction of Routes 23 and 16, and government patrols have advanced to within three miles of the road junction. Communist resistance can be expected to increase as the irregulars move closer to the Communists' primary supply route to Saravane from the south.

Still Slipping on Route 13

Pathet Lao and dissident neutralist units continue to beset disorganized Lao Army units along Route 13 and forestall planned government counterattacks. Their latest target was a small Lao Army force regrouping on 7 January for another counterattack against Sala Phou Khoun. A Communist shelling and ground attack dispersed this force and the government troops retreated north along Route 13 toward Kiou Khacham. Other Communist units on 8 January ambushed Lao Army units moving along Route 13 between Vang Vieng and Muong Kassy.

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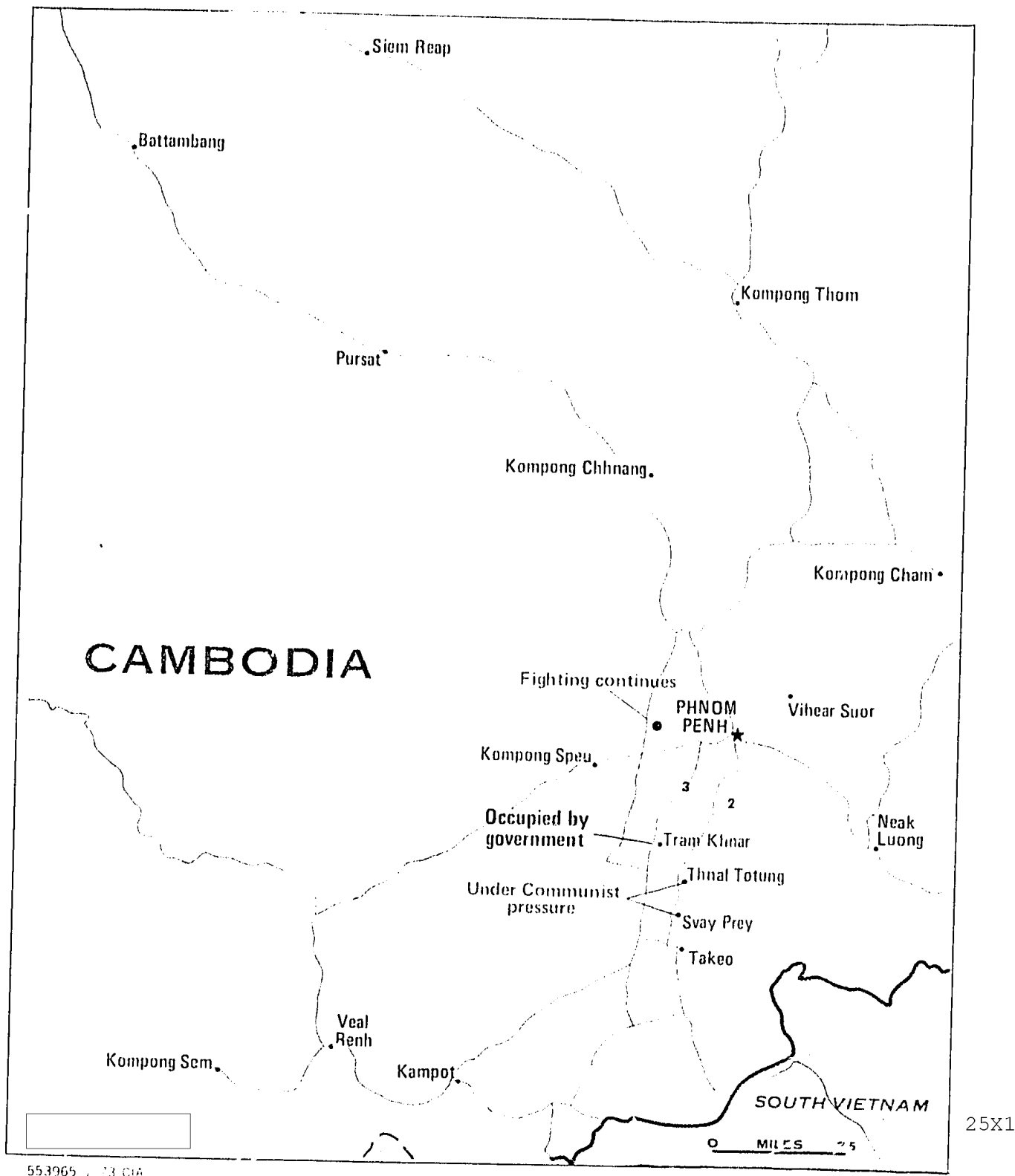
Most of the 1,000-man force from Sala Phou Khoun has filtered south to Muong Kassy, where army commanders are trying to reorganize them to defend the town against an anticipated Communist attack. Military leaders see little chance of regaining the initiative along Route 13 without the infusion of seasoned troops.

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[REDACTED]

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CAMBODIA

Cambodian Army troops reportedly have dislodged Khmer Communist elements from Tram Khnar, and the insurgents are now located just south of that village on Route 3. Other Communist units are keeping up their harassing attacks along Route 2, against government defenders at Thnal Totung and Svay Prey.

[REDACTED]

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The Cambodian Army general in charge of the government's operations in the Route 2 - Route 3 area told a US army attaché that the insurgent troops in that sector are better armed, led, and disciplined than his own soldiers.

The fighting west of Phnom Penh that began on 4 January is continuing, and appears to be heavier than previously indicated. The government evidently has not lost any positions, but the Cambodians thus far have suffered 23 killed and 123 wounded. The local commander, who is one of Lon Nol's military favorites, apparently is by-passing the chain of command in Phnom Penh and is reporting directly to the President.

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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